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SUBJECT: MFA'S THOUGHTS ON ZIMBABWE SITUATION

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen J. Nolan, Reason 1.4(b)

¶1. (C) Summary: From Botswana's point of view, Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement (GPA) is deeply flawed and unlikely to lead to any meaningful power sharing in the foreseeable future, according to Ambassador Zibane Ntakhwana, Africa and Asia Department Director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Botswana has been skeptical of the agreement since it was signed last year, and ZANU-PF's recent harassment of Roy Bennett clearly shows that ZANU-PF is not acting in good faith. Ntakhwana described Botswana's current relations with Zimbabwe as poor, although he said Gaborone maintains contact with several ZANU-PF and security service leaders. SADC shows little sign of taking on Mugabe, and Ntakhwana said South Africa under President Zuma does not seem to be taking a harder line than it did under Mbeki. End summary.

GPA DEEPLY FLAWED

¶2. (C) In a 20 October meeting with Poloff, Ntakhwana said that seeking to resolve the political impasse in Zimbabwe remains at the top of Botswana's foreign affairs agenda, particularly given the extensive resources the GoB is forced to spend on returning and caring for economic migrants from its neighbor. However, Ntakhwana said the GoB does not think the unity government that resulted from last year's GPA is the answer. While hoping for the best, Ntakhwana said the GoB has been skeptical of the agreement from the start, on the premise that they never trusted that Mugabe and ZANU-PF would treat the agreement in good faith. Given recent events, particularly the prosecution of MDC leader Roy Bennett, Ntakhwana thinks GoB skepticism was justified.

RELATIONSHIP POOR, BUT LINES OF COMMUNICATION EXIST

¶3. (C) Ntakhwana described current bilateral ties with Zimbabwe as poor, stemming from President Khama's willingness to publicly criticize Mugabe. Botswana's outspokenness is

what led to Zimbabwean allegations last year that the GoB was providing paramilitary training to MDC cadres. Ntakhwana said Botswana acceded to a SADC investigation that determined that the allegations were "rubbish", but even though a report was tabled at the September SADC Summit in Kinshasa, the relationship remains poor.

¶4. (C) That said, Ntakhwana told Poloff that the GoB still maintained ties to senior ZANU-PF leaders. He said ZDF Commander Constantine Chiwenga is "someone we know quite well," although Ntakhwana said he is a committed hardliner and Mugabe loyalist. Other GoB contacts include State Security Minister Sydney Sekeramayi ("a gentleman"), Transport Minister Nicholas Goche, and CIO Director Happyton Bonyongwe. Ntakhwana said Bonyongwe is actually quite moderate, but said some of the guys under him are "tough nuts."

SADC DISAPPOINTING
QSADC DISAPPOINTING

¶5. (C) Ntakhwana said SADC's response on Zimbabwe continues to be disappointing, and he sees no change on the horizon. Botswana has few allies in SADC when it comes to taking a harder line on Zimbabwe, with only Tanzania, Mauritius, and sometimes Malawi showing willingness to take a stand. As for the rest, Ntakhwana said Namibia "is radical as ever", Angola "has the same 'see no evil, hear no evil' approach it's always had", and SADC chair Congo "is preoccupied with its

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own problems." Mozambique too has been a disappointment in not leaning harder on Mugabe.

¶6. (C) Ntakhwana said the biggest disappointment, however, is South Africa. Jacob Zuma, he noted, made very positive noises about taking a tougher line on Zimbabwe before he was elected, but since taking office in April, he has done nothing drastically different than former President Mbeki. Ntakhwana said South Africa's overarching focus on stability hinders any initiative toward bold action, which is disappointing since South Africa is the only country in the region that can put the screws to Mugabe if it really wanted to.

LONG TERM WORRIES ABOUT POWER VACUUM

¶7. (C) Asked about his thoughts on the ultimate resolution of Zimbabwe's impasse, Ntakhwana said that while he hopes for "divine intervention" in terms of Mugabe's departure from office, he worries about the possibility of a power vacuum if Mugabe dies unexpectedly. ZANU-PF has not sorted out its succession debate, and the securocrats in the party and military will ensure that their interests are protected after Mugabe goes. Ntakhwana said that these securocrats are going to need ironclad deals that protect them from prosecution for war crimes (particularly "lunatics" like Air Force Commander Perence Shiri) and provide them payoffs. That said, after the prosecution of Charles Taylor, it is going to be very difficult to get these guys to trust any guarantees.

¶8. (C) Ntakhwana also said he worries about the MDC's capacity to govern in a post-Mugabe environment. When looking at the party, Ntakhwana said many in the GoB have serious doubts about the leadership qualities of Prime Minister Tsvangirai, whom he said "is malleable, vacillates too much, and is easily compromised." However, Ntakhwana noted that the GoB thinks the party does have some other strong leaders -- the GoB is very impressed with Finance Minister Tendai Biti, as well as with Commerce Minister (and MDC-Mutambara faction leader) Welshman Ncube.

COMMENT

19. (C) Given recent events in Zimbabwe and the region, the GoB's skepticism about both ZANU-PF's commitment to powersharing and SADC's willingness to take on Mugabe ring quite true. Of particular interest was Ntakhwana's admission that the GoB maintains contact with senior Zimbabwean securocrats despite poor bilateral ties. Given the securocrats' current prominence and likely importance in a post-Mugabe dispensation, Botswana's ties to them suggest Gaborone could prove a valuable go-between if contact from Washington needed to be established, particularly in a crisis situation like Mugabe's sudden demise. End comment.

NOLAN